

Traffic Safety Facts

Laws

March 2005

Graduated Driver Licensing System

Background

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) at the U.S. Department of Transportation encourages States to implement a graduated driver licensing system. Easing young drivers onto the roadways by controlling their exposure to progressively more difficult driving experiences can reduce the incidence of traffic crashes involving young drivers.

Young drivers (ages 15-20) are involved in traffic crashes and are twice as likely as adult drivers to be in a fatal crash. Sixteen-year-old drivers have crash rates that are three times higher than 17-year-old drivers, five times greater than 18-year-old drivers, and twice the rate for 85-year-old drivers. The problems contributing to these higher crash rates include lack of driving

experience and inadequate driving skills; excessive driving during nighttime, higher-risk hours; risk-taking behavior; poor driving judgment and decision making; drinking and driving; and distractions from teenage passengers.

To address these problems, traffic safety researchers developed a licensing system that would prolong the learning process for young, inexperienced drivers. Based on this system, NHTSA and the American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators (AAMVA) developed an entry-level driver licensing program to give young drivers more time to learn the complex skills required to operate a vehicle. The program consists of three stages, identified at each stage by the type of license: learner's permit, intermediate (provisional) license, and full licensure. Young drivers are required to demonstrate responsible driving behavior at each stage of licensing before advancing to the next level.

Key Facts

- In 2003, 3,657 drivers 15 to 20 years old were killed, and an additional 308,000 were injured in motor vehicle crashes.
- Approximately one-third of all deaths for people aged 15-20 are from motor vehicle crashes, according to data from the National Center for Health Statistics. This is the leading cause of death for this age group.

- In 2003, 7,884 15- to 20-year-old individuals were involved in fatal crashes – a 5 percent increase from 1993. Driver fatalities for this age group increased by 13 percent between 1993 and 2003. For young males, driver fatalities rose by 9 percent, compared with a 25 percent increase for young females.
- In 2003, 14 percent (7,884) of all the drivers involved in fatal crashes (58,156) were young drivers (15 to 20 years old), and 18 percent (1,954,000) of all the drivers involved in law enforcement reported crashes (11,155,000) were young drivers. However, these drivers account for only 6.4 percent of all licensed drivers in the United States.
- Nearly one-third of the 15- to 20-year-old drivers involved in fatal crashes who had an invalid operator's license at the time of the crash also had a previous license suspension or revocation.
- 31 percent of 15- to 20-year-old drivers who were killed in motor vehicle crashes during 2003 had been drinking.
- In 2003, 63 percent of youth (aged 15-20) who died in passenger vehicles were not wearing safety belts (where restraint use was known).
- In 2003, 46 percent of 15-20 year old fatalities occurred in speed-related crashes.

Inside This Issue

- Background
- Key Facts
- How Effective Are Graduated Driver Licensing Systems?
- How Does Graduated Driver Licensing Work?
- Incentive Grant Program
- Which States Have a Graduated License System?
- Information Sources

- Graduated driver licensing has been shown to reduce crashes by young drivers.

How Effective Are Graduated Driver Licensing Systems?

Evaluations clearly show the benefits of adopting graduated driver licensing laws. Florida's graduated driver licensing law resulted in a 9 percent reduction in crashes for drivers who were 16 and 17 years old. Ongoing research in Michigan, and North Carolina has shown a 26 percent and 25 percent reduction respectively in crashes involving 16-year-old drivers. Ohio has shown similar positive results. Graduated licensing laws adopted in the late 1970's and early 1980's also have had positive effects. For instance, California reported a 5 percent reduction in crashes and a 10 percent reduction in traffic convictions for 16- and 17-year-old drivers, while Oregon saw a 16 percent reduction in crashes for male drivers aged 16 and 17.

Nova Scotia reported a 24 percent reduction in crashes involving 16-year-old drivers while a preliminary report from Ontario, Canada, cites a 31 percent reduction in crashes for all drivers 15 to 19 years old.

How Does Graduated Driver Licensing Work?

In the mid-1990s, the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, the National Safety Council, the National Transportation Safety Board, and NHTSA met to establish a National model for graduated driver licensing. By establishing a national model, the various traffic safety groups sought to provide guidelines for States considering a graduated driver licensing system.

The three stages of the graduated licensing system include specific components and restrictions to introduce driving privileges gradually to beginning drivers. Novice drivers are required to demonstrate responsible driving behavior during each stage of licensing before advancing to the next level.

Each stage includes recommended components and restrictions for States to consider when implementing a graduated licensing system. Examples of components and restrictions of each stage include:

Stage 1: Learner's Permit

- State sets minimum age for a learner's permit.
- Pass vision and knowledge tests, including rules of the road, signs, and signals.
- Complete basic vehicle skills training.
- Licensed adult (who is at least 21 years old) required in the vehicle at all times.
- All occupants must wear safety belts.
- Teenage passenger restrictions.
- Zero alcohol while driving.
- Permit is distinctive from other driver licenses.
- Must remain crash- and conviction-free for at least six months to advance to the next level.
- Parental certification of practice hours.

Stage 2: Intermediate (Provisional) License

- Complete Stage 1.
- State sets minimum age.

- Pass a behind-the-wheel road test.
- Complete advanced driver education training (e.g., safe driving decision making, risk education, etc.).
- All occupants must wear safety belts.
- Licensed driver required in the vehicle during late-night hours (e.g., night-time driving restriction).
- Zero alcohol while driving.
- Driver improvement actions are initiated at lower point level than for regular drivers.
- Provisional license is distinctive from a regular license.
- Teenage passenger restrictions.
- Must remain crash- and conviction-free for at least 12 consecutive months to advance to the next stage.
- Supervised practice.

Stage 3: Full Licensure

- Complete Stage 2.
- State sets minimum age.
- Zero alcohol while driving.

Incentive Grant Program

In 1998, Congress passed H.R. 2400, the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21). TEA-21 made substantial changes to the existing Section 410 alcohol incentive grant program. States have qualified for a "Programmatic Basic Grant" if they submit materials demonstrating that they meet five out of seven grant criteria. One of these seven grant criteria is a graduated driver licensing system. In 2004, 15 of 36 states that qualified for this program met the Graduated Drivers Licensing System criteria. (23 CFR1313.5(d)).

Which States Have a Graduated License System?

As of December 2004, forty States plus the District of Columbia have matched or exceeded all component parts of the model GDL law adopted by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS), the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), and the National Safety Council (NSC). These States are:

Alabama	Nevada
Alaska	New Hampshire
California	New Jersey
Colorado	New Mexico
Connecticut	New York
Delaware	North Carolina
Florida	Ohio
Georgia	Oregon
Idaho	Pennsylvania
Illinois	Rhode Island
Indiana	South Carolina
Iowa	South Dakota
Louisiana	Tennessee
Maine	Texas
Maryland	Utah
Massachusetts	Vermont
Michigan	Virginia
Mississippi	Washington
Missouri	West Virginia
Nebraska	Wisconsin

Information Sources

Beginning Teenage Drivers. DOT HS 809 177.

Consultation on provisions and implementation of graduated licensing systems, from AAMVA and NHTSA.

Evaluation studies from Florida, California, Maryland, Michigan (2002), North Carolina (2002), Oregon, and New Zealand showing the benefits of graduated licensing, from NHTSA.

Graduated Driver Licensing: Q&A. DOT HS 808 856.

Graduated Licensing System: Learning the Skill, Earning the Privilege. Two-volume resource package, AAA Government Relations.

Research Agenda for an Improved Novice Driver Education Program. Report to Congress, NHTSA, May 1994.

Saving Teenage Lives: The Case for Graduated Driver Licensing. DOT HS 808 801, 1998.

Scientific Research on Graduated Driver Licensing, Journal of Safety Research, January Volume 35, No. 1, October 2003.

Testimony before State legislatures, from AAMVA and NHTSA.

Young Drivers: The High-Risk Years. Video, IIHS.

Teen Driver A Family Guide to Teen Driver Safety, National Safety Council.

These reports and additional information are available from your State Highway Safety Office, the NHTSA Regional Office serving your State, or from NHTSA Headquarters, Office of Safety Programs, ATTN: NTI-122, 400 Seventh Street, S.W., Washington, DC 20590; 202-366-9508; or NHTSA's web site at www.nhtsa.dot.gov



U.S. Department
of Transportation
**National Highway
Traffic Safety
Administration**

www.nhtsa.dot.gov
nhtsa
people saving people